Ministry of Agriculture

Farm & Food Report

Communications Branch, Walter Scott Building
3085 Albert Street, Regina, Canada, S4S 0B1

Saskatchewan

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PULSE GROWERS INVESTIGATE OPPORUNITIES IN INDIA

With a gross domestic product growing at eight per cent per year, a population of 1.2 billion and a high demand for pulse crops, the burgeoning Indian market is too attractive for Saskatchewan agricultural producers to ignore.

The Saskatchewan Pulse Growers (SPG) sent a delegation of four to India to investigate the potential for split decorticated green lentils in Indian food, and to determine the capacity of Indian agricultural institutions to collaborate on research. They were accompanied by representatives from Pulse Canada, the University of Saskatchewan Crop Development Centre, and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

Because many Indian graduate students attend the University of Saskatchewan for agricultural and engineering studies, the delegation had a good foundation to build relationships, beginning at Tamilnadu Agriculture University in Coimbatore.

The institution was a key destination for the group. Meeting with management and research scientists, they explored research possibilities for incorporating green lentils into the Indian diet.

Based on the success of the meeting, the Saskatchewan delegation intends to fund a research project at the university. "It's a complete plan, from product development to testing to commercialization," said SPG Executive Director Garth Patterson. The key component will be to evaluate the marketability of Saskatchewan split green lentils in traditional Indian foods.

After leaving Coimbatore, the next stop was Pune to visit the BAIF Development Research Foundation, a non-profit organization founded by Mahatma Ghandi to improve the life of rural subsistence farmers.

The Canadian government has a strong relationship with BAIF, because the Canadian International Development Agency initially built its head office. As a result, Patterson says the delegation was warmly received, and heard a great deal about how the foundation is working to improve life for farm families.

Other stops on the trip included the Indian Agricultural Research Institute in New Dehli and the Central Institute of Post-Harvest Engineering and Technology in Ludhiana.

Throughout the visit, the delegation learned a lot about India's agricultural industry. Because of the nation's high level of productivity in agriculture, it is able to support its large population.

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In a country that is able to grow any crop, wheat and rice are popular for cultivation, because yields are four to five times that of pulses. Wheat production also lends itself well to mechanization, while pulses continue to be harvested by hand. As a result, wheat acreage increases and pulse producers are forced toward marginal land.

Despite production challenges, pulses are an important part of the Indian diet. "India is really the Mecca for pulse consumption in the world," Patterson said. "They are still the largest producer and consumer of pulses, and historically pulses have been a part of every meal of the day for centuries. So that's the big opportunity for us as exporters of pulse crops."

According to Patterson, if enough pulses were available, India would consume 18 to 20 million metric ones per year. Annual production totals only 15 million metric ones.

Saskatchewan faces the opposite situation. Plenty of pulses are produced, but only a small percentage is consumed domestically. While Canadian pulse producers work to develop the North American market, one million metric ones of peas will be exported from Saskatchewan to India this year.

Green lentils represent the next big opportunity for Indian export, because of their potential to complement common dishes. "India is already our most important customer, as far as exports go," Patterson said. "We think there's opportunity for that to grow even more."

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COW HORSEMAN IMPRESSES ACROSS THE CONTINENT

Cow horseman competitions are growing in popularity, largely because crowds are fascinated by watching a horse and rider work a cow in patterns and maneuvers.

Saskatchewan has one of the best in the business in Dale Clearwater of Hanley. At a competition in Stephenville, Texas this February, Clearwater earned top honours and over $17,000 for his efforts.

Clearwater was raised on a farm near Nipawin. At the age of 16, he began a career riding in pastures for eight years. Because pasture work is seasonal, during the winter he went to Alberta to work for horse trainers. In 2002, he spent a year working with a cow horse trainer before returning to Saskatchewan in 2004 to venture out on his own.

Clearwater has traveled North America with cow horse competitions. He entered his first show in 2001. Since then, he has earned approximately $100,000 from both cow horse and cutting competitions.

Critical to the success of cow horse showmen is a solid understanding of animals. Clearwater gained much of his knowledge from working in pastures. "I think being a good showman involves being able to do the cowboying end of things and working with animals all day," he said. "It makes you a better showman, because you understand how the cattle and horses think."

Saskatchewan riders will soon have an opportunity to learn from Clearwater's expertise. The Sandhills Stable near Saskatoon is hosting a Working Cow Clinic on March 29 and 30, with a repeat clinic on April 26 and 27.

These workshops will help participants prepare for cow horse shows and competitions. Rein work components include lead changes, stops and turnarounds. In addition, attendees will practice working cows down the fence and circling.

Bonnie DeWitt of Sandhills Stable expects participants to represent a mix of people, with some simply wanting an introduction to the sport, while more experienced competitors will be looking for tips and skill development.

Demand for cow horse training is increasing. The clinics Clearwater has held over the past two years have all sold out. While the March offering is already full, DeWitt says there are still a few spots open at the April workshop if prospective participants hurry.

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Upon starting a clinic, it takes Clearwater very little time to earn the respect of any doubters, given the amazing ease with which he is able to move cattle.

"When you put a good run together, nothing feels as good as that," Clearwater said. At the competition in Texas, everything went perfectly for him, "but it can go the other way, too. You're humbled and you go home and work harder," he noted.

For now, Clearwater will enjoy his success, and enjoy teaching his skills to others interested in the practice.

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BARREL RACING AND POLE BENDING CLINIC TO CULTIVATE SKILLS

With rodeo season fast approaching, young barrel racers and pole benders will have an opportunity to fine-tune their preparations by participating in a clinic to be held in Fort Qu'Appelle on March 22 and 23.

The clinic, hosted by Clearview Stables, will be led by Kelley Byrne, a professional rider, with the assistance of Gloria Kadlec, who serves on the boards of the Saskatchewan Barrel Racing Association and the Saskatchewan High School Rodeo Association.

Although barrel racing is an event familiar to rodeo patrons, pole bending is restricted to high school and collegiate rodeos. The course setup has six poles spaced 21 feet apart. Like barrel racing, it is a timed event that begins with a sprint to the end, then a turnaround to weave through the poles, turn 180 degrees, another weaving sequence, ending with a final sprint to the timer line. Time penalties are applied for knocking over a pole.

Good horsemanship is the foundation of both barrel racing and pole bending. The clinic will develop the participants' horsemanship skills to facilitate agile movements. "The next level is to make a proper turn to come in and out of a barrel. The same goes for the poles, to get the horse to move off their legs without having a whole lot of face contact," Kadlec said.

Training and skill development are beneficial to a rider's success, but so are the unique characteristics of the horse. Speed and the ability to make a quick turn on its haunches are important. "You also want a horse that's going to listen and not fight with you," Kadlec noted, adding that the most successful barrel racing horses are level-headed.

The participants in the clinic are most likely to be teenagers. Racers typically start out during their teen years, although the activity certainly appeals to all ages. According to Kadlec, adults also attend clinics, but they are more likely to seek training in basic horsemanship clinics before progressing to a racing clinic. "You have to have horsemanship to be able to compete at that faster level," she stated.

Barrel racing also accommodates horses of varying age. Four and five year-old horses compete in futurity events, while top competitive horses range in age from 10 to 15 years.

Those who attend the Fort Qu'Appelle clinic will really benefit from the wisdom of an experienced professional like Kelley Byrne, Kadlec says. Byrne rides with the Canadian Professional Rodeo

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Association and the Canadian Cowboys' Association circuit. She is also involved with the Saskatchewan Barrel Racing Association, hosting and attending many jackpots around the province.

Anyone interested in participating in the two-day event should contact Gloria Kadlec or Kevin Smith at Clearview Stables. Stalls are available to board the horses overnight, and lunch will be provided. The cost to attend will be $150 to $200, depending on the level of participation.

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REMEMBER YOUR NEIGHBOURS WHEN MANAGING FLAX STRAW

To many of us, there is a certain nostalgia associated with the smell of smoke. Fond memories of summer campfires, burning leaves in the fall and the comfort of wood burning stoves in the winter can be evoked by those wisps of smoke in the air.

Unfortunately, for many others, the incidence of smoke and the particulates it sends into the atmosphere do not represent a positive experience at all, but a very serious health risk.

With spring soon upon us, some farmers will be looking to burn off flax straw from last year's harvest before seeding this year's crop. The Saskatchewan Flax Development Commission is encouraging producers to be mindful of the impacts that burning flax straw can have on individuals with lung and pulmonary ailments, as well as on society and the environment in the broader context.

One of its partners in the effort is the Lung Association of Saskatchewan. Paul Van Loon, the Vice President of Health Education with the Association, says it is more often a case of people being unaware of the harmful effects that burning and smoke can create, rather than simply not caring.

"In an area like Saskatchewan, people are generally less mindful of air quality than other issues," Van Loon noted. "For example, people will usually care and take action regarding litter on the ground, because it has a visual impact. But when it comes to smoke, most people think it just disappears because you can't see it."

Although there may be a limited visual appearance to smoke, there is nonetheless a very powerful health impact. To those suffering from a variety of respiratory conditions, smoke of any type – including from flax straw – can pose a real health hazard.

People who suffer with these conditions are faced with having to stay indoors, taking increased medication, missing work or school days, and potentially making a rushed trip to the emergency room of the nearest hospital. This group also includes asthma sufferers, for whom smoke and the particulates it discharges can trigger an asthma attack.

For people with these diseases, one day of being exposed to breathing crop residue smoke can mean several days of feeling sick. Most often, it is the elderly, the very young and anyone with a compromised immune system who faces the brunt of these effects.

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"For whatever reason, we are a changing population, and many people are becoming more sensitive to certain environmental conditions," Van Loon said.

Although the burning of flax straw or other crop residue is a seasonal and often localized issue, it can still have a tremendous effect on some of society's most vulnerable citizens. The Lung Association of Saskatchewan website advises that if producers have to burn because of extenuating circumstances, they should take the following factors into consideration:

- Never burn at night. Damp conditions produce more harmful smoke emissions. Temperature changes and calmer conditions often cause smoke retention or poor dispersal. Burn only after 11:00 a.m. and be sure that all fires are extinguished well before sunset.
- Have an adequate fireguard and water supply.
- Burn only when wind conditions allow for quick upward dispersion of smoke. Producers are urged to consult Environment Canada regarding wind conditions in their areas. Smoke should never be allowed to drift over neighboring communities or roads.
- Do not burn across an entire field or windrow. A large field, stubble or windrow burn produces more smoke. Piled or baled straw will burn hotter and faster, and produce fewer pollutants.

Legislation to eliminate or limit burning is already in place in many jurisdictions around the world. To date Saskatchewan has chosen to rely on voluntary action, requesting that producers consider their neighbours as they prepare their fields for seeding.

In the meantime, the Saskatchewan Flax Development Commission is working with the Government of Saskatchewan and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada on an Agri-Environmental Group Plan for straw management. The goal is to develop beneficial management practices that will enhance economic opportunities for flax straw and improve air quality.

For more information about burning field residue, and guidelines to follow when it is a necessity, contact the Lung Association of Saskatchewan at 1-888-566-5864. Material can also be accessed online at www.sk.lung.ca by clicking on the "Air" link, then "About the Air We Breathe," "Outdoor Air Quality," and finally, "Open Burning."

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SOUTH CENTRAL FARMERS ADAPT TO CHANGING CONDITIONS

The last 20 years have brought revolutionary change to the agricultural industry, and the dynamic producers of the south central region of Saskatchewan have adapted to find new means of success.

One such farmer is Wayne Baron, who operates the Lantern Ranch with his wife, Cindy.

Baron produced wheat for 12 years, until 1990. At the time, most farmers in the area grew wheat, and it was considered adventurous to grow two or three different crops.

Wheat was a natural choice for the region's climate, because it can withstand above-average levels of heat, wind and drought. Wheat's storability also meant farmers could keep it in their bins for long periods of time and sell when they found the most favourable prices.

Baron ventured away from wheat into other crops such as canola, sunflower and malting barley in response to changes to the grain handling fee structure. Baron feels that the discontinuation of the Crow Rate subsidy provided what was perhaps a necessary catalyst to encourage producers to diversify. "It forced a lot of farmers to explore different crops, which maybe we should have been doing in the first place," he said.

It was Baron's experience that sunflower is especially well-suited to the south central conditions, because of the plant's hardiness. He still believes that, with more market development, sunflower holds significant potential.

"Sunflower was supposed to rival canola in the food market because of its health benefits," Baron said. However, while demand for canola has greatly increased, sunflower has yet to achieve such a strong foothold in the market.

In the end, Baron has found his niche in mixed hay. His alfalfa-crested wheat is supplied to private farmers and ranchers for cattle feed. Other producers sell to feedlots, but Baron says there are even more opportunities. "If you've got good quality alfalfa, you can sell to the dairy farmers," he noted. Supplying the dairy industry, however, is dependent on transportation, since there are few such producers in his region.

While Baron produces mixed hay, his neighbours are also trying different crops. "They have gone to a wide variety of crops. You can probably count ten different crops in my area now. From wheat and

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durum to canola, mustard, peas – yellow, green, kabouli – to two or three different kinds of lentils," he observed.

The variety is a marked change from 20 years ago, when farmers were generally trying three or four different crops at most. Wheat and durum were by far the most popular. "Now it's nothing to find a farmer with eight different crops in his bins," he noted.

Baron plans to stick with mixed hay at Lantern Ranch, but would like to venture into cattle to diversify his operations. He expects that other area producers will continue to expand and do the same.

Cyclical weather patterns suggest that the region is due for a drought every 50 years or so. However, Baron feels that very change ushers in new opportunity for south central producers. He believes the area's potential lies in a return to native grasses and the development of ranching.

For the future prospects of Lantern Ranch, Baron is optimistic. The sensitivity of agricultural prices to supply and demand brings both challenges and opportunities. "If you can ride it out, you'll be back on top one day," he said. "And it looks like we're now on the upswing."

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